Inquisition - Spanish, Roman & Torture | HISTORY

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Conversos

In the late 15th Century, King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella of Spain believed corruption in the Spanish Catholic Church was caused by Jews who, to survive centuries of anti-Semitism, converted to Christianity.

Known as Conversos, they were viewed with suspicion by old powerful Christian families. Conversos were blamed for a plague and accused of poisoning peoples' water and abducting Christian boys.

Ferdinand and Isabella feared that even trusted Conversos were secretly practicing their old religion; the royal couple was also afraid of angering Christian subjects who demanded a harder line against Conversos—Christian support was crucial in an upcoming crusade against Muslims planned in Granada.

Ferdinand felt an Inquisition was the best way to fund that crusade, by seizing the wealth of heretic Conversos.

Torquemada

In 1478, under the influence of clergyman Tomas de Torquemada, the monarchs created the Tribunal of Castile to investigate heresy among Conversos. The effort focused on stronger Catholic education for Conversos, but by 1480, the Inquisition was formed.

That same year, Jews in Castile were forced into ghettos separated from Christians, and the Inquisition expanded to Seville. A mass exodus of Conversos followed.

In 1481, 20,000 Conversos confessed to heresy, hoping to avoid execution. Inquisitors decreed that their penitence required them to name other heretics. By the year's end, hundreds of Conversos were burned at the stake.

Spanish Inquisition

Hearing the complaints of Conversos who had fled to Rome, Pope Sixtus proclaimed the Spanish Inquisition was too harsh and was wrongly accusing Conversos. In 1482 Sixtus appointed a council to take command of the Inquisition.

Torquemada was named Inquisitor General and established courts across Spain. Torture became systemized and routinely used to elicit confessions.

Sentencing of confessed heretics was done in a public event called the Auto-da-Fe. All heretics wore a sackcloth with a single eyehole over their heads. Heretics who refused to confess were burned at the stake.

Diego de Deza took over as Inquisitor General, escalating the hunt for heresy within cities and rounding up scores of accused heretics, including members of the nobility and local governments. Some were able to bribe their way out of imprisonment and death, reflecting the level of corruption under de Deza.

After Isabella's death in 1504, Ferdinand promoted Cardinal Gonzalo Ximenes de Cisneros, the head of the Spanish Catholic Church, to Inquisitor General. Ximenes had previously made a mark in Granada persecuting the Islamic Moors.

As Inquisitor General, Ximenes pursued Muslims into North Africa, encouraging Ferdinand to take military action. Upon seizing African towns, the Inquisition became established there. Ximenes was dismissed in 1517 after pleas from prominent Conversos, but the Inquisition was allowed to continue.

Roman Inquisition

Rome renewed its own Inquisition in 1542 when Pope Paul III created the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition to combat Protestant heresy. This Inquisition is best known for putting Galileo on trial in 1633.

In 1545, the Spanish Index was created, a list of European books considered heretical and forbidden in Spain, based on the Roman Inquisition's own *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. In other nods to Rome's concerns, the Spanish Inquisition focused on the rising population of Spanish Protestants in the 1550s.

In 1556, Philip II ascended the Spanish throne. He had previously brought the Roman Inquisition to the Netherlands, where Lutherans were hunted down and burned at the stake.

Inquisition in the New World

As Spain expanded into the Americas, so did the Inquisition, established in Mexico in 1570. In 1574, Lutherans were burned at the stake there, and the Inquisition came to Peru, where Protestants were likewise tortured and burned alive.

End of the Spanish Inquisition

In 1808, Napoleon conquered Spain and ordered the Inquisition there to be abolished.

After Napoleon's defeat in 1814, Ferdinand VII worked to reinstate the Inquisition but was ultimately prevented by the French government, which helped Ferdinand overcome a fierce rebellion. Part of the agreement with France was to dismantle the Inquisition, which was defunct by 1834.

The last person to be executed by the Inquisition was Cayetano Ripoll, a Spanish schoolmaster hanged for heresy in 1826.

The Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition still exists, though changed its name a couple of times. It is currently called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Sources

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